

Identifying the Dead in Medieval China

October 30–31, 2026
Brown University

Location

Andrews House, 13 Brown Street
Providence, RI 02912

In approaching the study of individuals in medieval China (here, 10th–14th centuries), art historians and historians often attempt to categorize people by “identity” to better understand and contextualize their lives. Identities might include social class and profession (scholar-official, merchant, military official), ethnicity (Han, Jurchen, Kitan, Mongol), geographic situation (urban, rural, northern, southern), and religious/philosophical affiliation (Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, Nestorian), among others. Often, the textual record encourages this type of broad categorization—*muqimings* (entombed epitaphs) often identify the profession, hometown, gender, and other characteristics of the subject, for example. However, when investigating individuals within their funerary context, the idiosyncratic, and sometimes fluid nature of identity markers becomes more pronounced. Indeed, the burial context of individuals often contradicts some of the categorizations implied by *muqimings* or other texts. In this symposium, we bring together scholars working on aspects of China’s middle period to chart paths forward for our scholarship. How can we interpret signifiers of identity in medieval China broadly, and in the funerary context in particular? What are best practices for studying people largely excluded from the textual record?

Symposium Program

Friday, October 30

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| 8:30–9:00 | Coffee and pastries |
| 9:00–9:15 | Opening Remarks – Eiren Shea and Jeffrey Moser |
| | First Panel |
| 9:15–10:00 | Don J. Wyatt, <i>Words to Avert the Inconstant: Meaning and Purpose in Epitaphs of the Song Era</i> |
| 10:00–10:45 | Zhang Cong, <i>Remembering Lady Cui (1007–1062): Writing the Memory of an Elite Woman in Northern Song China</i> |
| 10:45–11:15 | Coffee break |
| 11:15–12:00 | Tali HersHKovitz, <i>From Their Cradle to Her Grave: Unearthing Social Identities and Gender at the Lü Family Cemetery</i> |
| 12:00–12:30 | Panel Discussion led by Beverly Bossler |
| 12:30–1:30 | Lunch on site |
| | Second Panel |
| 1:30–2:15 | Fei Deng, <i>The Power of Writing: Mural Inscriptions and the Making of Identity in Song and Jin Tombs</i> |
| 2:15–3:00 | Ya-hwei Hsu, <i>Neo-Confucianism in Southern Song and Yuan Burials</i> |
| 3:00–3:30 | Coffee break |

3:30–4:15	Lucien Sun, <i>A Tomb of Many Faces: Rethinking the Burials of Quanzhen Daoists Song Defang and Pan Dechong</i>
4:15–4:45	Panel Discussion led by Jason Protass
4:45–5:00	Coffee break
5:00–5:30	Roundtable discussion
6:00	Dinner for all participants, Brown Faculty Club

Saturday, October 31

9:00–9:30	Coffee and pastries
	Third Panel
9:30–10:15	Eiren Shea, <i>Unearthing the lives of local elite women of the Yuan dynasty: the Wang Family Tombs as Case Study</i>
10:15–11:00	Jeehee Hong, <i>The Intersectional Dead: Funerary Portraits from the Hexi Corridor, ca. 1300</i>
11:00–11:15	Coffee break
11:15–12:00	Aurelia Campbell, <i>Tracing the Decline of Decorated Tombs in the Yuan Dynasty</i>
12:00–12:30	Panel Discussion led by Bonnie Cheng
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch on site
	Fourth Panel
1:30–2:15	Yi-bang Li, <i>Defining the Identities of the Dead: The Inscriptions in Two Yuan-Dynasty Tombs</i>
2:15–3:00	Dagmar Schäfer, <i>The Naked Body: Textiles, Identification, and Technological Knowledge in Yuan China</i>
3:00–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–4:00	Panel Discussion led by Brian Vivier
4:00–4:30	Closing Remarks – Eiren Shea and Jeffrey Moser
4:30–5:30	Reception
5:30–6:00	Next Steps Discussion for participants
6:30	Dinner for speakers and discussants, Bayberry Garden

Abstracts and short biographies are available [here](#).

The symposium will be held in person, all are welcome, please register [here](#).